Exeter College Oxford Summer Programme
Forensic Linguistics:
An Interdisciplinary Course on Language, Mind and Law

Course Description

Can the language we speak be the reason why we are judged to be guilty instead of innocent? This is just one of the exciting and socially relevant questions that we try to answer within the discipline of Forensic Linguistics, which studies language in legal contexts, such as courtroom communication and police interrogation. In this course you will learn, for example, that using language in a certain way may result in a more advantageous outcome for the speaker and by contrast, that certain other ways of using language may be considered law-breaking.

No prior knowledge of linguistics is required but having some competence in another language in addition to English is an advantage. This course is interdisciplinary and you will learn about the ways in which a number of disciplines are related to one another, including linguistics, the law, criminology, and psychology. You will also learn how different languages "package" information in different ways and why these differences affect the kind of information that is remembered and given to the police or in court. You will study the ways in which linguistic data can be used for the purpose of expert witness testimony. This course also provides hands-on illustrations of different methodologies (e.g. experiments, surveys and electronic corpus searches) that can be employed when using language as evidence in many contexts in addition to the legal one (e.g. in medical communication or in business development and branding). Practical work will be based on real-life cases, where you get a chance to study authentic materials from both the US and the UK, such as recordings and transcripts of police interrogations.

This Forensic Linguistics course is an excellent opportunity to gain and improve a number of widely transferrable skills, including different types of data analysis, effective argumentative writing, enhancement of general presentation and communication skills as well as acquisition of specialist linguistic knowledge and expertise that can be applied in many areas of academic or professional life.

Teaching Methods and Assessment

• 12 x 1.25hr Lectures (15hrs)

• 6 x 1.25hr Seminars (7.5hrs)

• 4 x 1.25hr Tutorials (5hrs)

Twice weekly lectures will provide theoretical and practical content on the key topics in Forensic Linguistics. A weekly seminar will be focused on a) hands-on practical work on authentic, real-life materials and b) discussion of essential literature on the topic. Students will be expected to have completed the relevant readings before each seminar. Tutorials will be used for knowledge consolidation, revision and preparation for exams.

Assessment: A final written exam consisting of two short essay questions c.500 words each and one text analysis question (45%), an essay of between 2,500-3,000 words (45%), and attendance (10%).

Examples of Practical Work:

i)   Forensic texts analysis (threat assessment, triage of emergency calls)
ii)   Analysis of police interrogation transcripts (US vs. UK)
iii)   Legal case studies: The role of language in legal outcomes
iv)   Experimental look at language effects on witness memory
v)   Multilingual mock trials: Does language use affect your judgement?
vi)   Expert witness: Can you be one?
vii)   Conflict resolution through debate: Learn to anticipate opponents' moves

Provisional Lecture Schedule:
Lecture 1: Introduction: What is linguistics and what makes it forensic?
Lecture 2: Language as a witness: Words and sentences revealing crime
Lecture 3: Language in Action: Do we say what we mean and mean what we say?
Lecture 4: Language crimes: Famous perjury and libel cases
Lectures 5&6: Police interviews in the UK and police interrogations in the US
Lectures 7&8: Language(s) in the courtroom
Lecture 9: Multilingual justice: The role of translators and interpreters
Lecture 10: Language and disadvantage: Minorities before the law
Lecture 11: Language and Mind: Witness memory
Lecture 12: Language and power & the power of language

Reading List
Key journals:
International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law https://journals.equinoxpub.com/index.php/IJSLL)
Language and Law Journal (www.languageandlaw.de)

Books, book chapters and journal articles:

Berk-Seligson, S. (1990) The Bilingual Courtroom: Court Interpreters in Judicial Process. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berk-Seligson, S. (2009) Coerced Confessions. The Discourse of Bilingual Police Interrogations. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Cotterill, J. (2003) Language and Power in Court: A Linguistic Analysis of the O.J.Simpson Trial. Basigstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Coulthard, M. and Johnson, A. (2007) An Introduction to Forensic Linguistics - Language as Evidence. London: Routledge.

Coulthard, M. and Johnson, A. (eds.) (2010) The Routledge Handbook of Forensic Linguistics. London: Routledge.

Filipović, L. (2007) Language as a witness: Insights from cognitive linguistics. *Speech, Language and the Law* 14(2): 245-267.
Filipović, L. (2013) The role of language in legal contexts: A forensic cross-linguistic viewpoint. In Freeman, M. and Smith, F. (Eds.) Law and Language: Current Legal Issues (15). Oxford: OUP, 328-343.
Hales, L. and Filipović, L. (2016) Language rights in danger: Access to justice and linguistic (in)equality in multilingual judicial contexts. In Pütz, M. and Filipović, L. (Eds.) Endangered Languages and Languages in Danger: Issues of Ecology, Policy and Documentation. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 61-85.
Filipović, L (2016) May vs. Might in the judgement on certainty: The difference between L1 and L2 English speakers. Applied Linguistic Review 7(2): 181-201.
Filipović, L. and Hijazo-Gascón, A. (2018) Interpreting meaning in police interviews: Applied Language Typology in a forensic linguistics context. Vigo International Journal of Applied Linguistics VIAL, 15, 67 – 104.
Filipović, L. and Abad Vergara, S. (2018) Juggling investigation and interpretation: The problematic dual role of police officer-interpreter. Law and Language, 5 (1), 62-79.
Filipović, L. (Ed.) (2021) Police Interviews: Communication Challenges and Solutions. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
Gibbons, J. (2003) Forensic Linguistics. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gibbons, J. and Turell, M. T. (2008) Dimensions of Forensic Linguistics. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Shuy, Roger W. (2005) Creating Language Crimes: How Law Enforcement Uses (and Misuses) Language. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shuy, Roger W. (2006) Linguistics in the Courtroom: A Practical Guide. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Olsson, J. (2004) Forensic Linguistics. London: Continuum

Olsson, J. (2009) Wordcrime: Solving Crime through Forensic Linguistics. London: Continuum.